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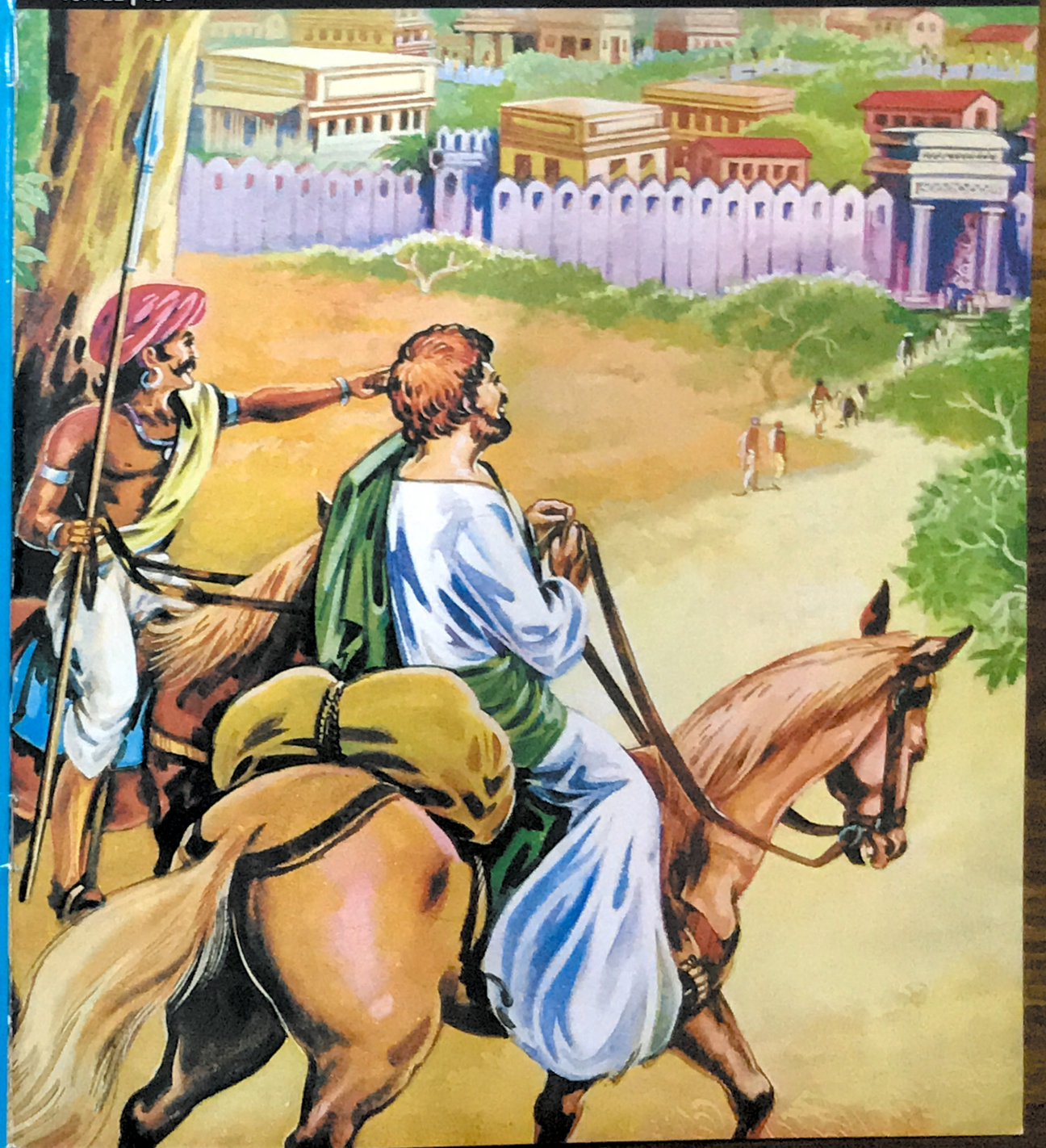
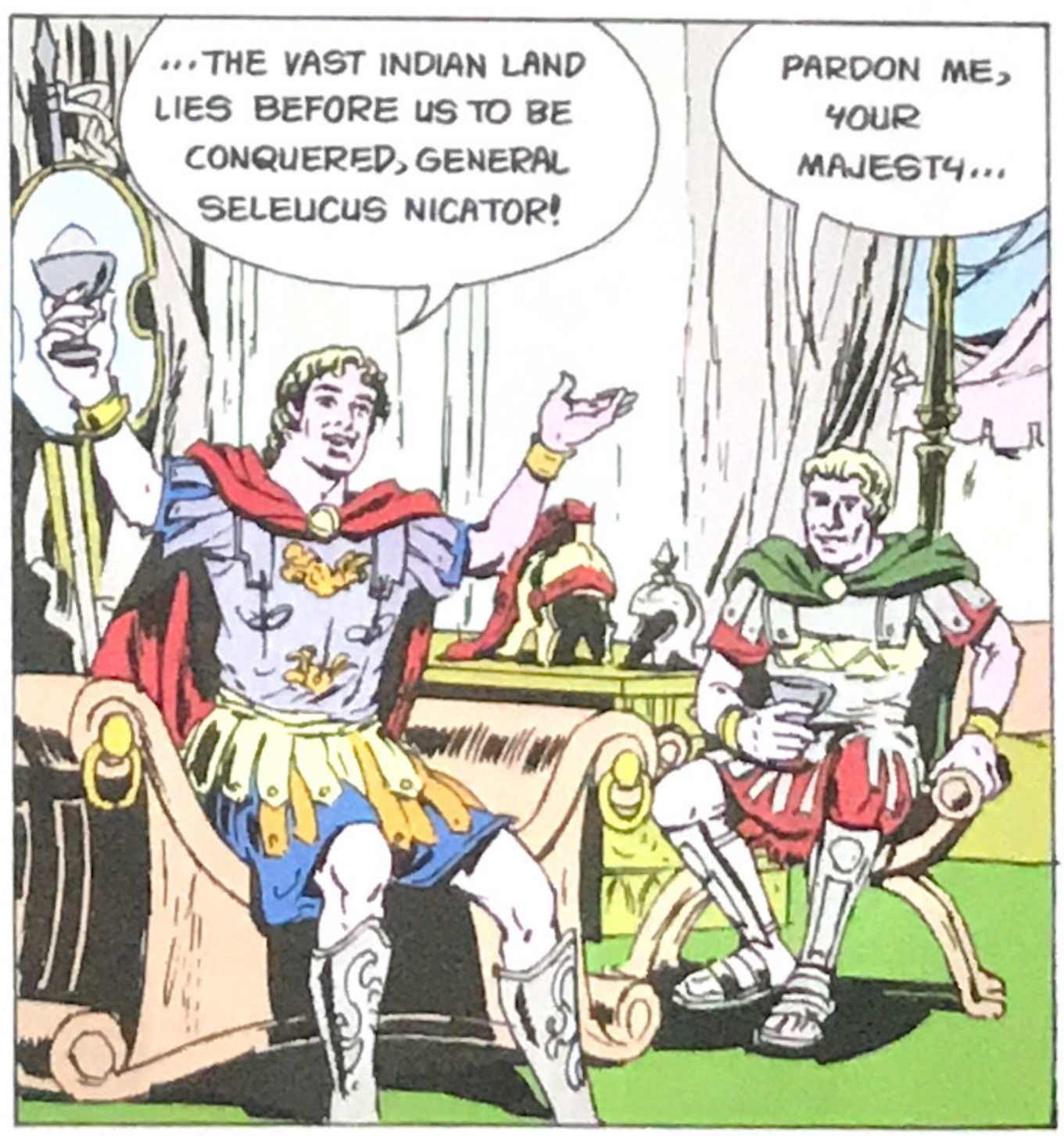


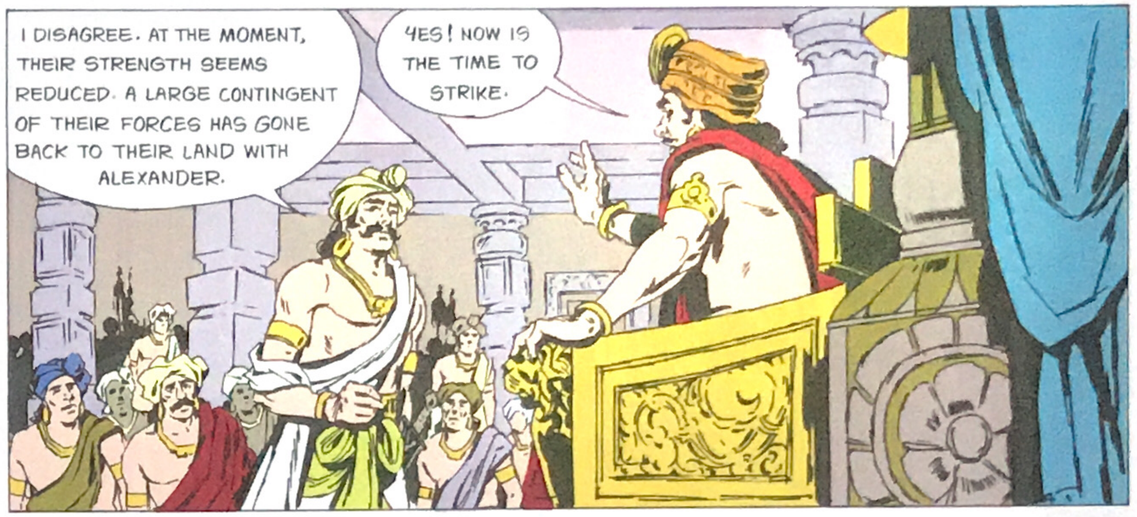
MEGASTHENES

AFTER HIS LONG AND ARDUOUS CAMPAIGN IN PERSIA, ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF MACEDONIA, REACHED THE NORTH-WESTERN FRONTIER OF INDIA IN 326 B.C. HE DEFEATED PAURAVA AND WAS FILLED WITH CONFIDENCE ABOUT HIS MILITARY PROWESS.

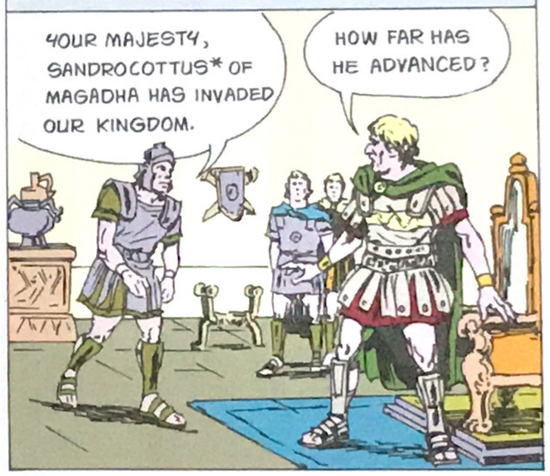


WITHIN A FEW YEARS SELEUCUS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS THE SOLE RULER OF THE GREEK DOMAINS.

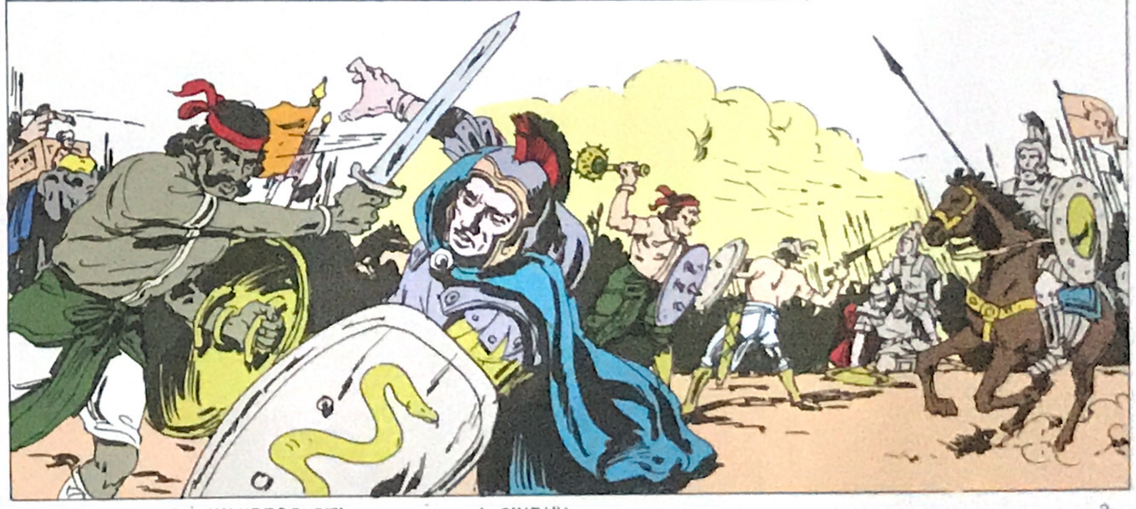
MEANWHILE, IN PATALIPUTRA, THE CAPITAL OF MAGADHA, KING CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA WAS BROODING OVER THE PROBLEM POSED BY THE GREEKS. HE HAD CALLED A MEETING OF HIS WAR COUNCIL.



SOME TIME LATER, IN THE GREEK DOMAIN—

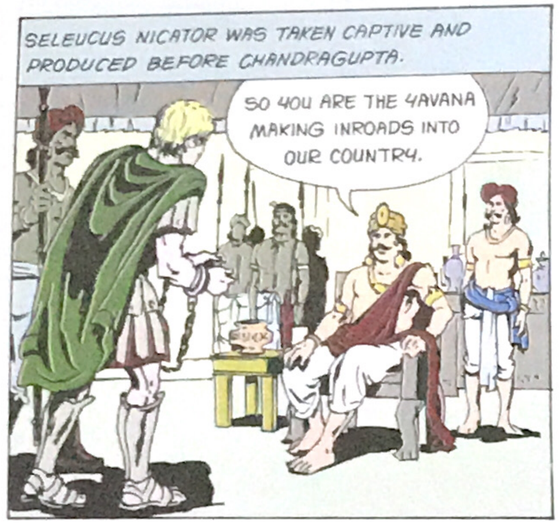


IN THE ENSUING WAR, HOWEVER, THE GREEKS WERE DEFEATED.



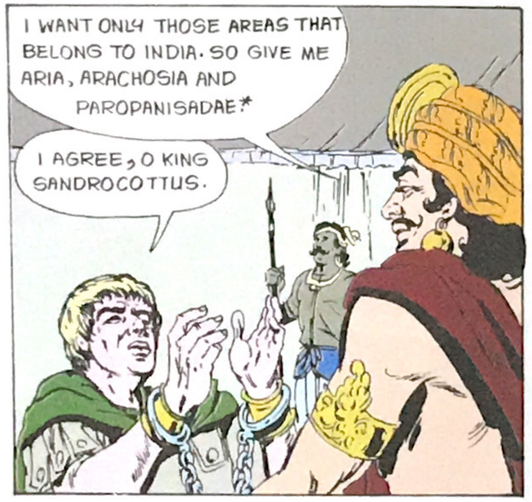
*GREEK NAME OF CHANDRAGUPTA

† SINDHU


SELEUCUS NICATOR WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE AND PRODUCED BEFORE CHANDRAGUPTA.
SO YOU ARE THE YAVANA MAKING INROADS INTO OUR COUNTRY.

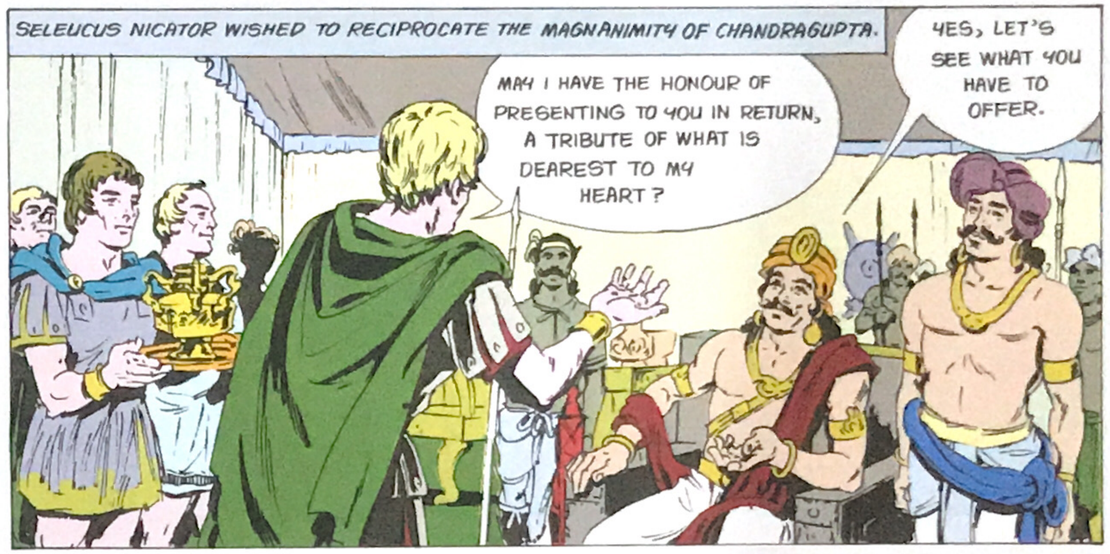
HAVE MERCY ON ME, SANDROCOTTUS, O GREAT KING OF INDIA.

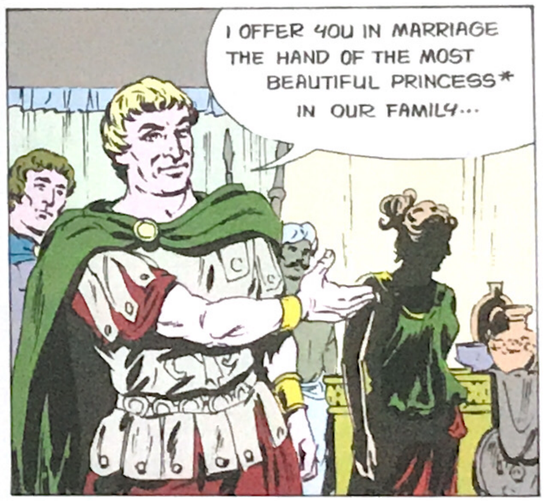
MY FORCES HAVE BEEN CRUSHED. I AM PREPARED TO PAY WHATEVER TRIBUTE YOU DEMAND.
YOU RULE VAST LANDS, SELEUCUS.


I WANT ONLY THOSE AREAS THAT BELONG TO INDIA. SO GIVE ME ARIA, ARACHOSIA AND PAROPANISADAE*
I AGREE, O KING SANDROCOTTUS.

FROM NOW ON, WE ARE FRIENDS AND SO ARE OUR TWO COUNTRIES. UNCHAIN HIM, GUARDS.

AS A TOKEN OF THIS FRIENDSHIP, I GIVE YOU 500 ELEPHANTS AS A SPECIAL GIFT FROM INDIA.
THANK YOU, O GREAT KING.


SELEUCUS NICATOR WISHED TO RECIPROCATE THE MAGNANIMITY OF CHANDRAGUPTA.
MAY I HAVE THE HONOUR OF PRESENTING TO YOU IN RETURN, A TRIBUTE OF WHAT IS DEAREST TO MY HEART?
YES, LET'S SEE WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER.

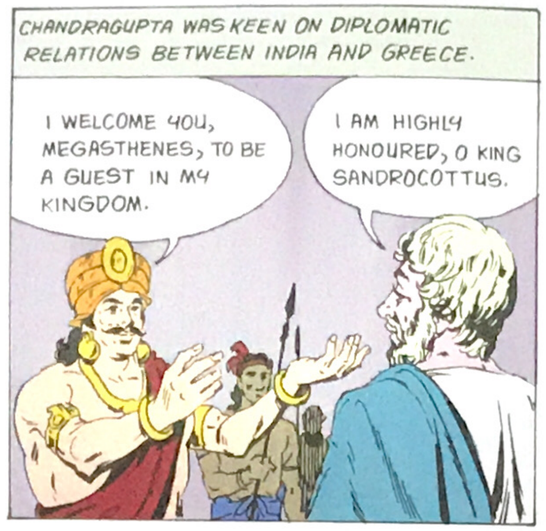

I OFFER YOU IN MARRIAGE THE HAND OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS* IN OUR FAMILY...

...AND I OFFER YOU MEGASTHENES.

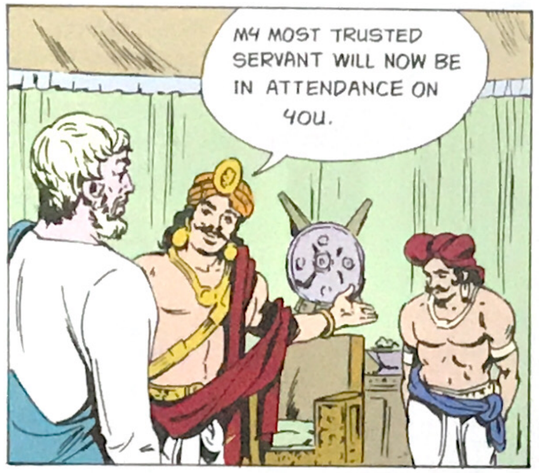
MEGASTHENES? WHO IS HE?

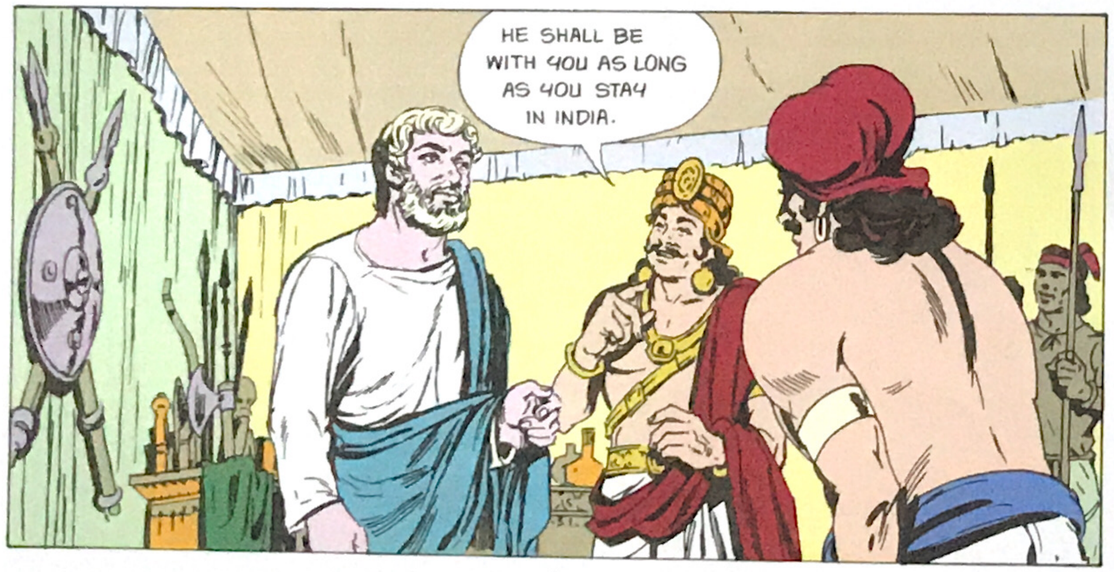
HE HAS SERVED ME LOYALLY FOR YEARS, O SANDROCOTTUS, AS MY AMBASSADOR IN SEVERAL LANDS. HE WILL BE MY AMBASSADOR AT YOUR COURT.

AS MY ENVOY TO YOU, I COULDN'T FIND A MAN OF GREATER CALIBRE AND OF A MORE VERSATILE MIND.
YOUR MAJESTY IS VERY KIND.

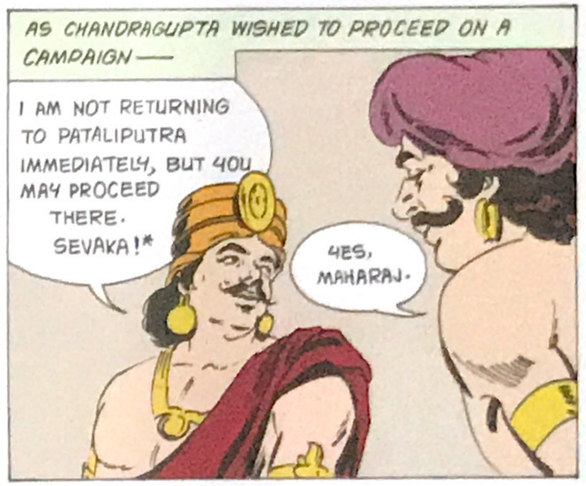

CHANDRAGUPTA WAS KEEN ON DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND GREECE.
I WELCOME YOU, MEGASTHENES, TO BE A GUEST IN MY KINGDOM.
I AM HIGHLY HONOURED, O KING SANDROCOTTUS.

I WISH TO HONOUR YOU, A GUEST TO MY LAND, IN OUR TRADITION OF REVERING GUESTS LIKE GODS.

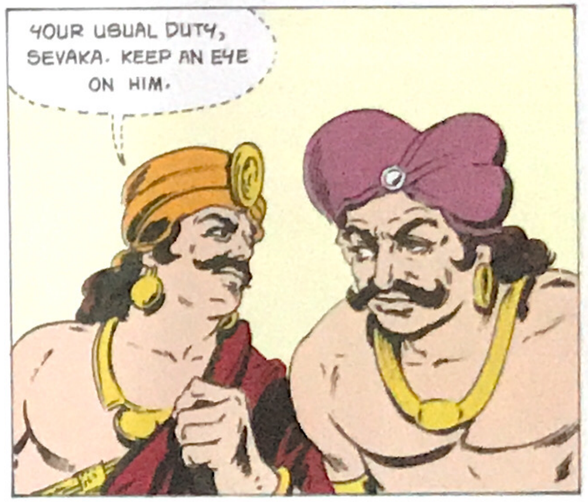

MY MOST TRUSTED SERVANT WILL NOW BE IN ATTENDANCE ON YOU.


HE SHALL BE WITH YOU AS LONG AS YOU STAY IN INDIA.

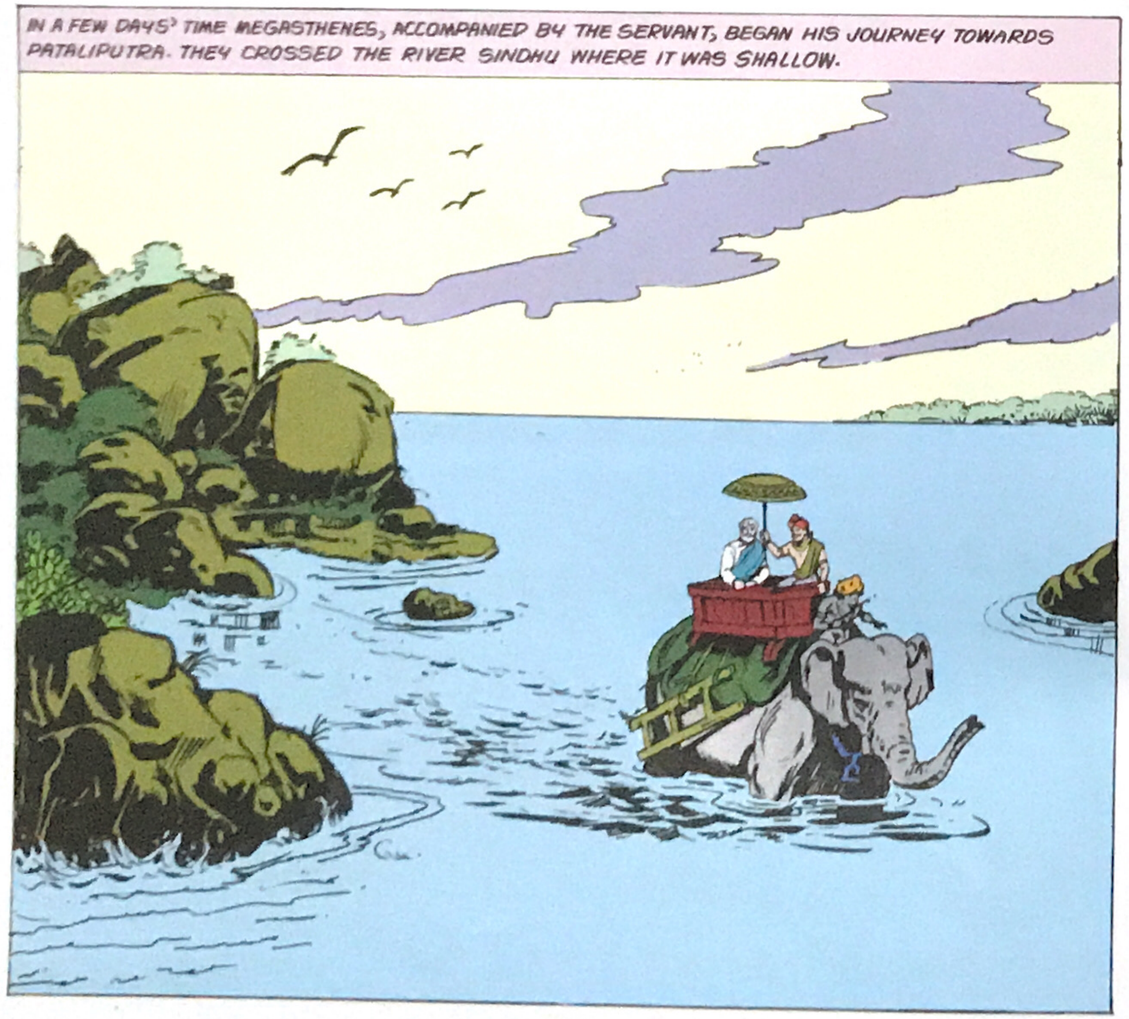
ALSO, I AM GIFTING YOU AN ELEPHANT AND TWO HORSES.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH, O KING.

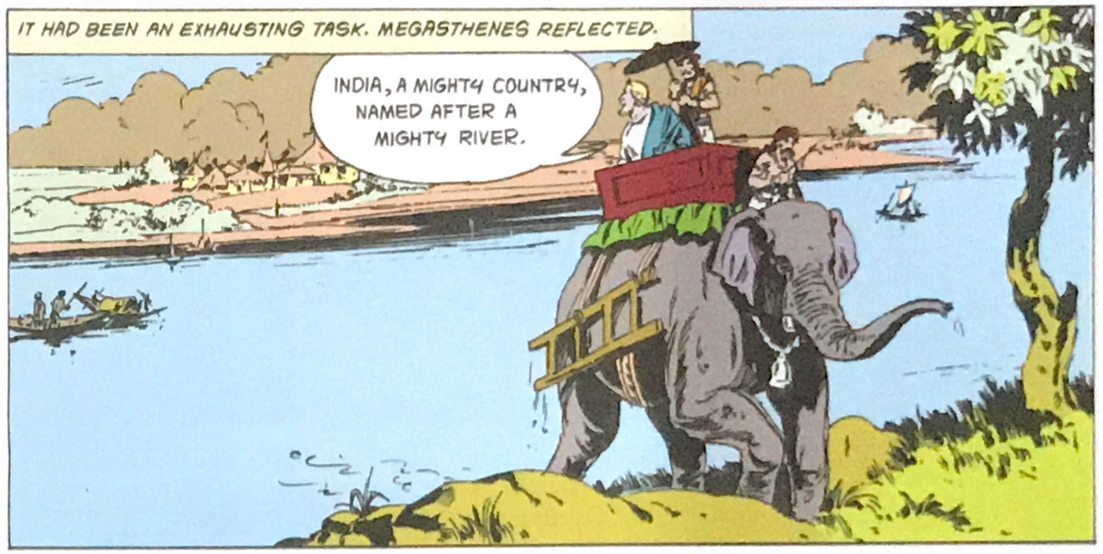

AS CHANDRAGUPTA WISHED TO PROCEED ON A CAMPAIGN —
I AM NOT RETURNING TO PATALIPUTRA IMMEDIATELY, BUT YOU MAY PROCEED THERE. SEVAKA!*
YES, MAHARAJ.

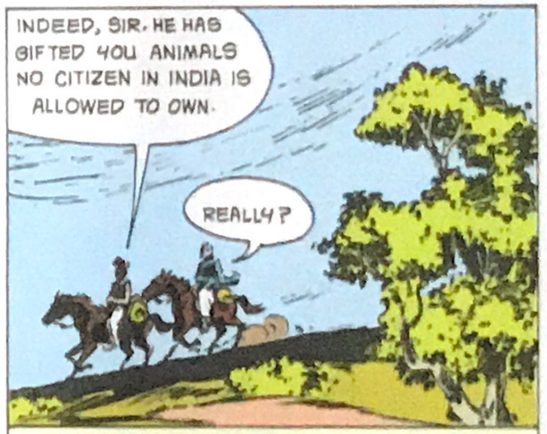
YOU WILL ACCOMPANY MEGASTHENES ON HIS WAY TO PATALIPUTRA.


YOUR USUAL DUTY, SEVAKA. KEEP AN EYE ON HIM.

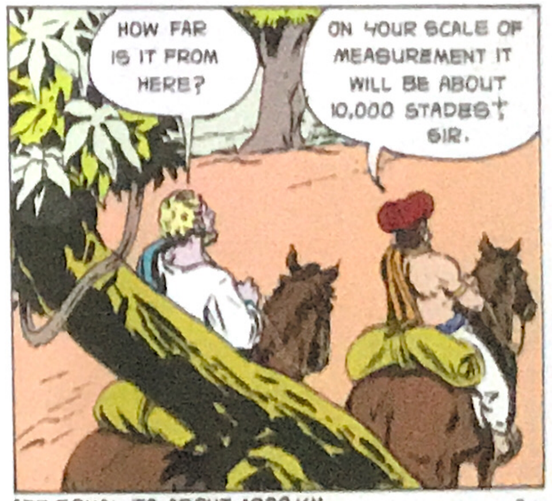
LATER, MEGASTHENES WENT TO THE CAMP OF SELEUCUS NICATOR TO BID HIM GOODBYE.
MAY I TAKE LEAVE OF YOUR MAJESTY NOW?
WAIT A MINUTE, MEGASTHENES.



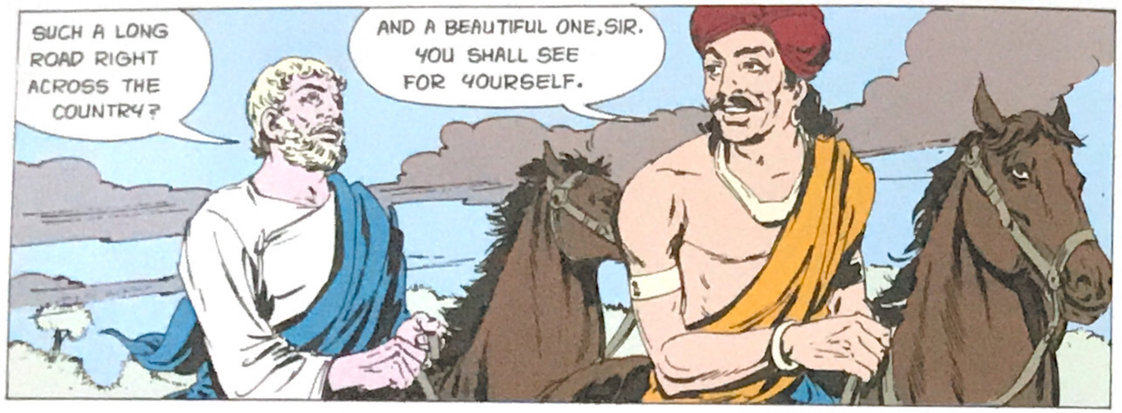


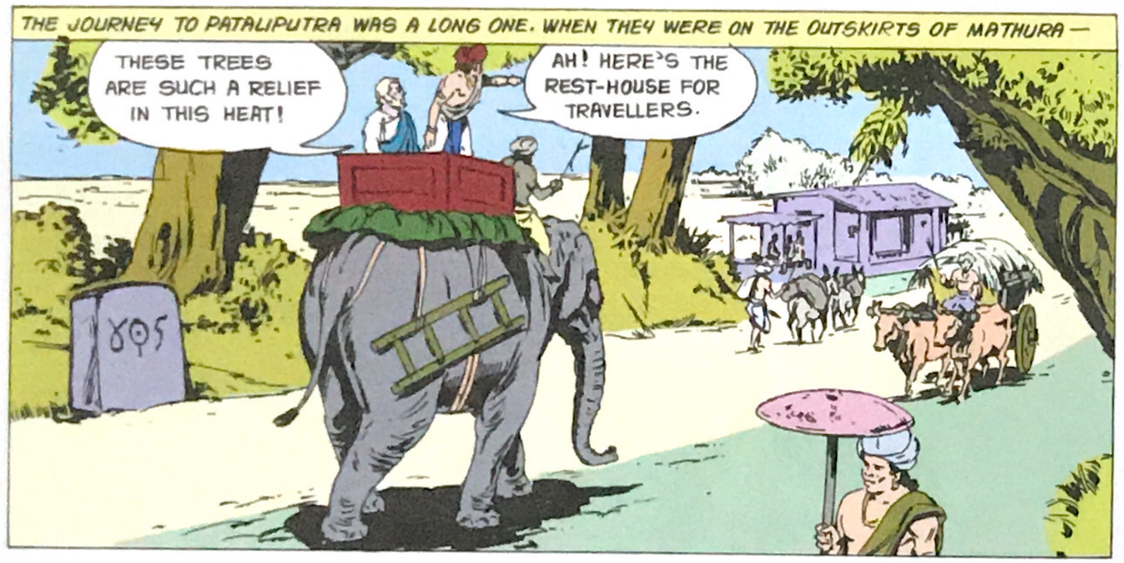


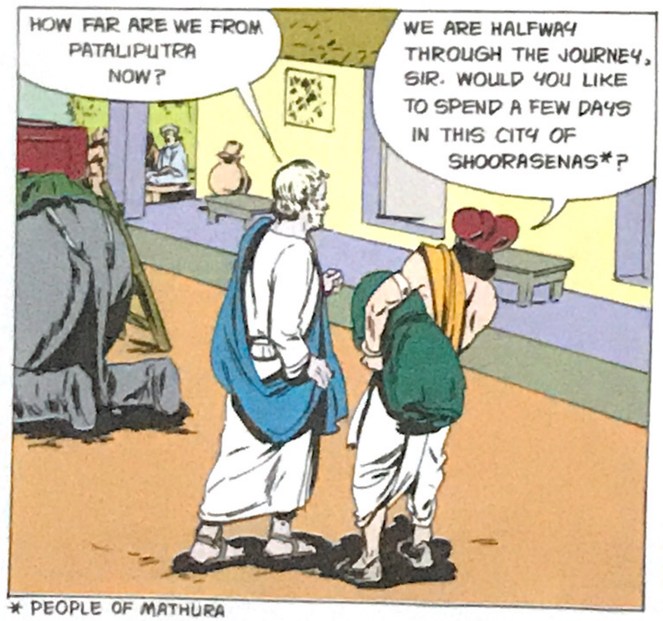
MEGASTHENES PREFERRED TO USE THE HORSES TO THE ELEPHANT DURING HIS TRAVELS.



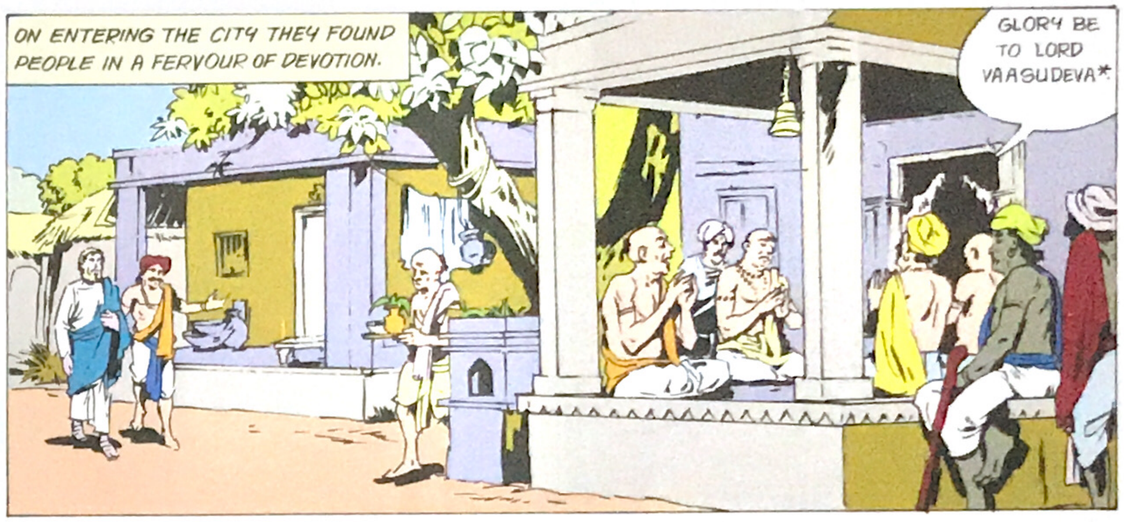
* GREEK FOR PATALIPUTRA. † 10,000 STADES ARE EQUAL TO ABOUT 1800 KM.

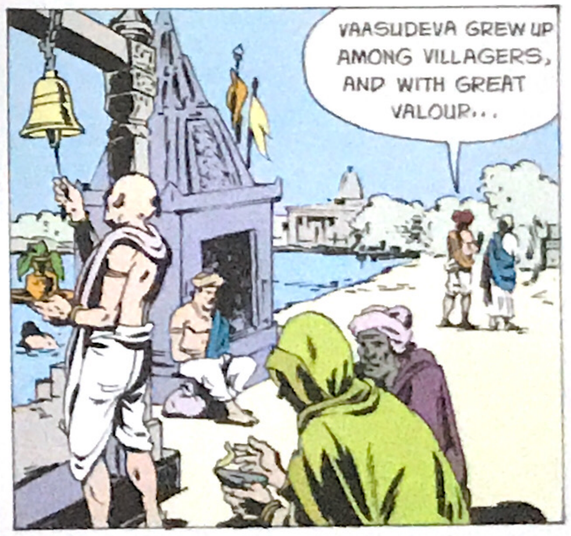




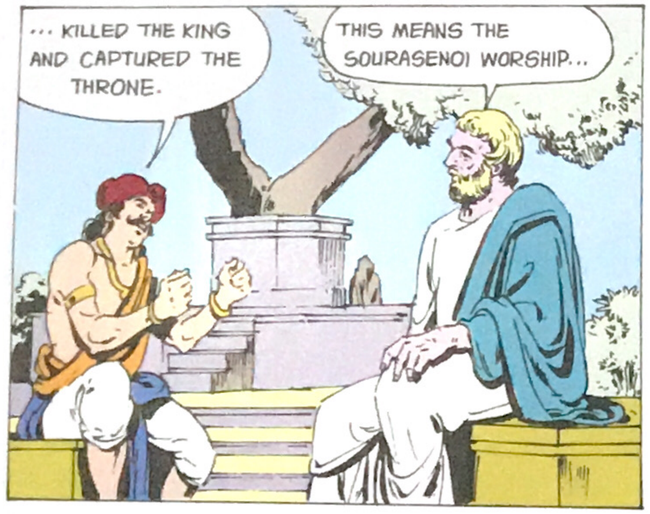


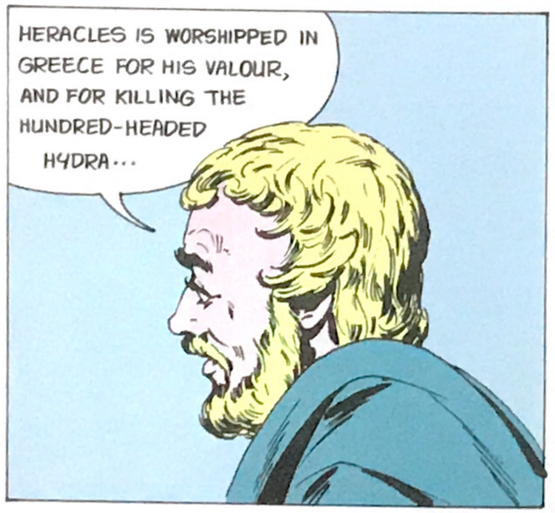
* PEOPLE OF MATHURA



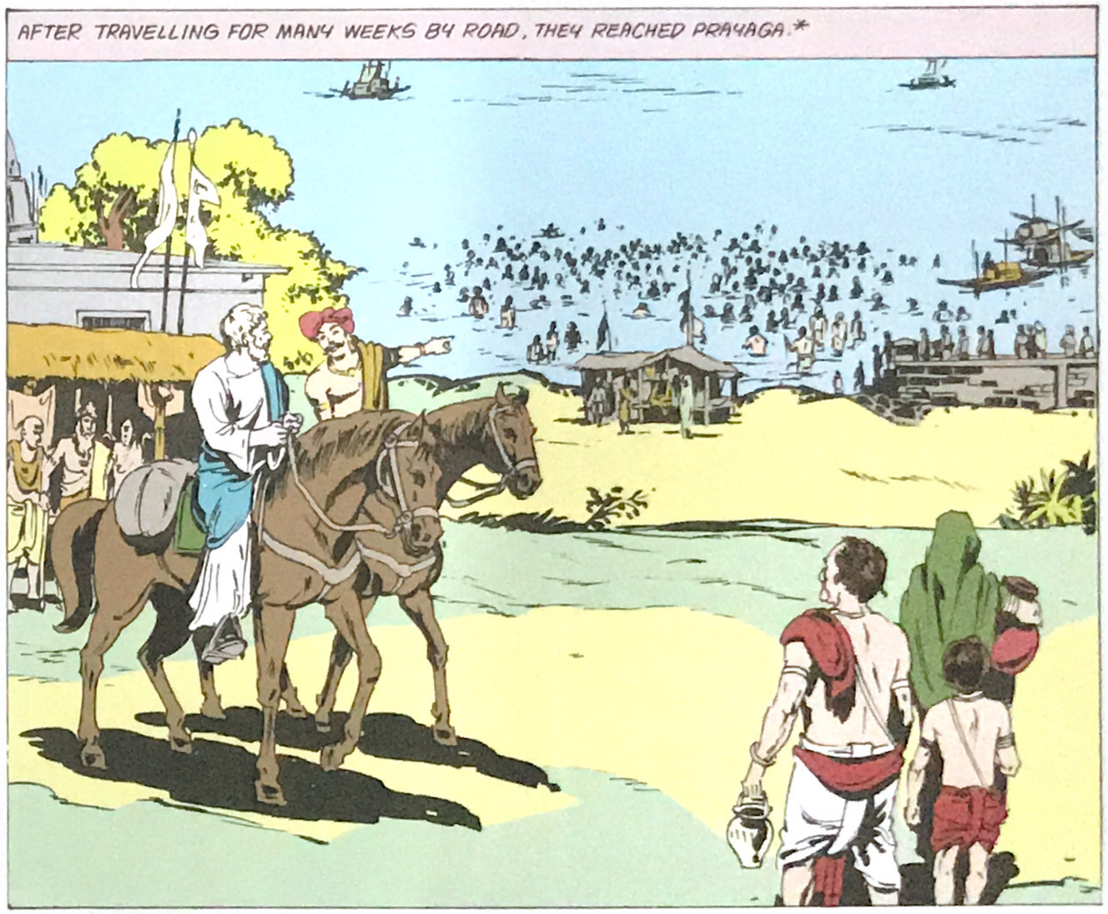


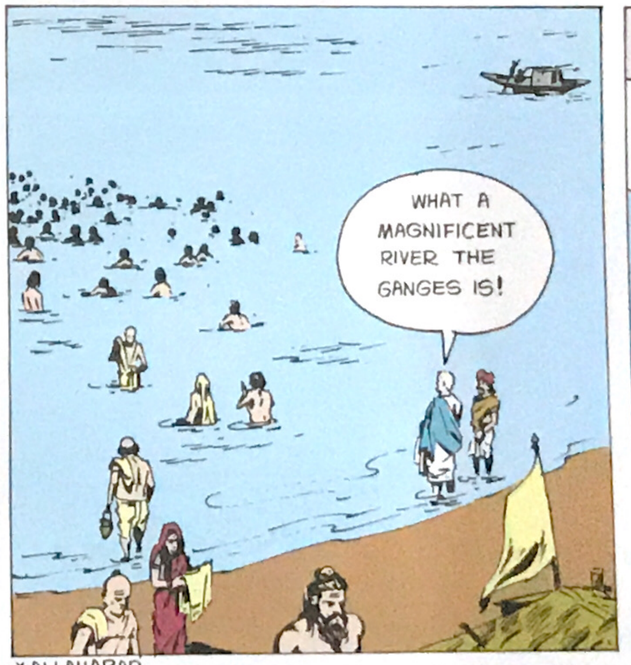
* KRISHNA



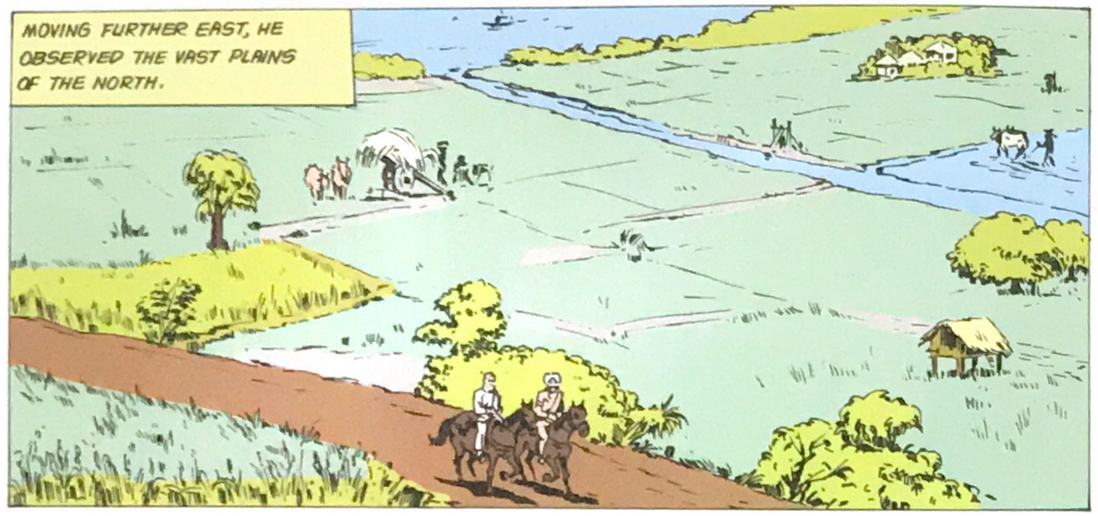


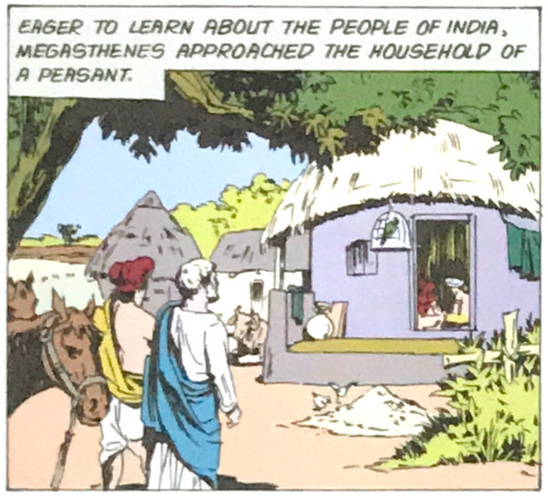
* SOME OF THE EXPLOITS OF HERACLES WERE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF KRISHNA. MEGASTHENES MUST HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY THESE SIMILARITIES.

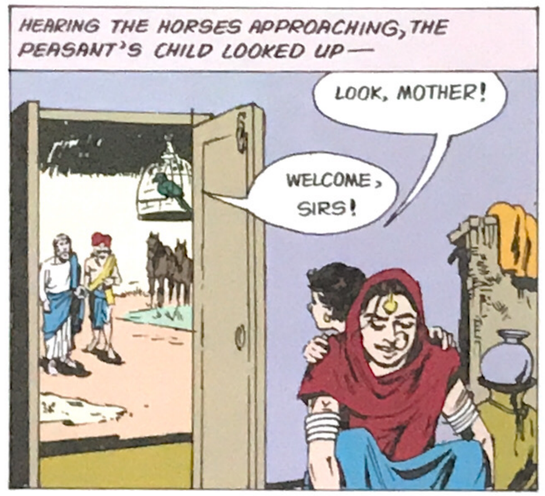


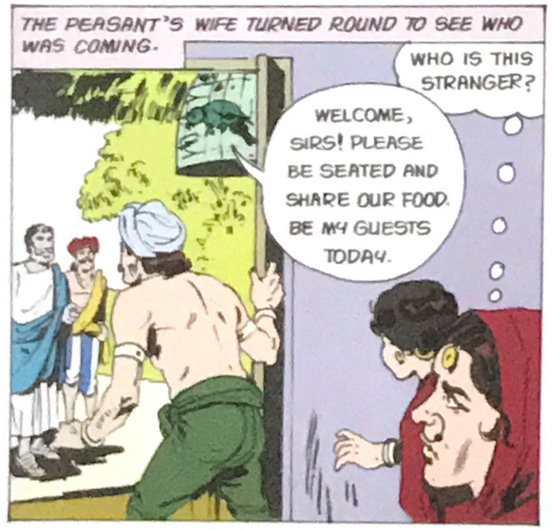


*ALLAHABAD.

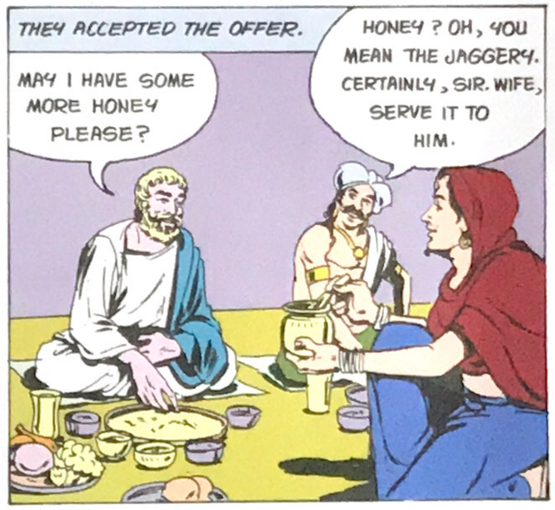

MOVING FURTHER EAST, HE OBSERVED THE VAST PLAINS OF THE NORTH.

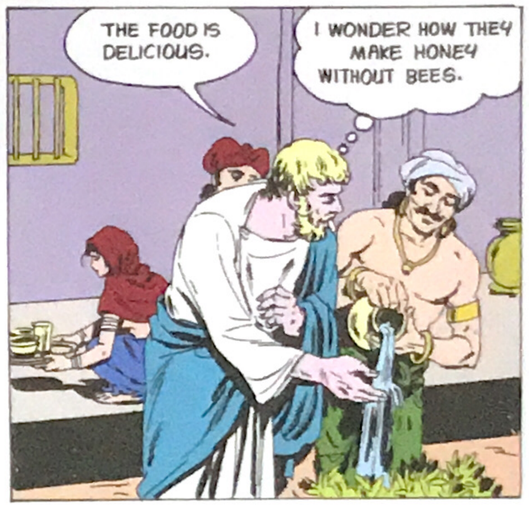

EAGER TO LEARN ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, MEGASTHENES APPROACHED THE HOUSEHOLD OF A PEASANT.

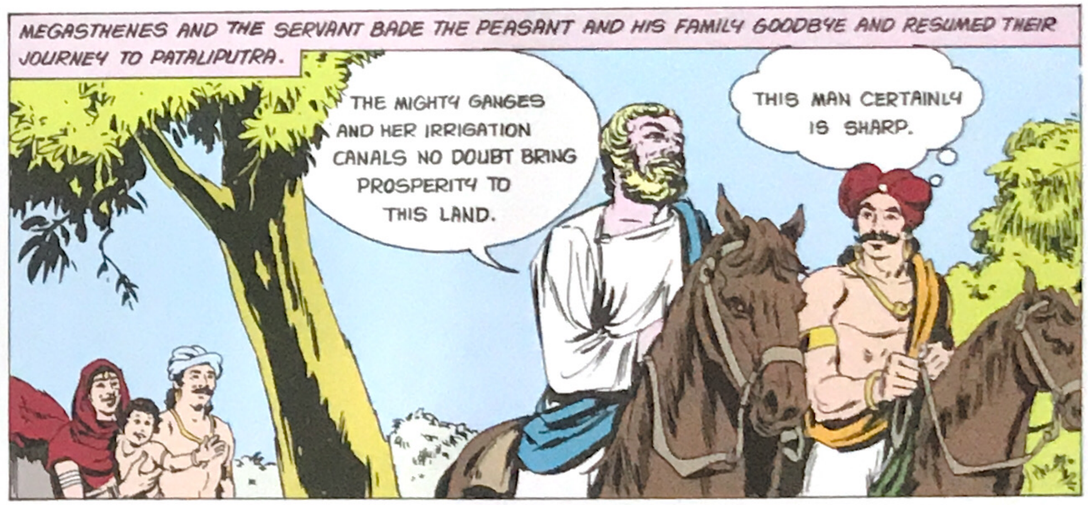

HEARING THE HORSES APPROACHING, THE PEASANT'S CHILD LOOKED UP—
LOOK, MOTHER!
WELCOME, SIRS!

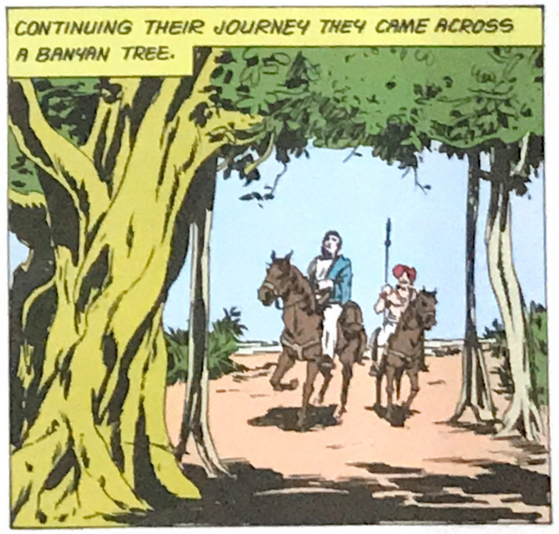

THE PEASANT'S WIFE TURNED ROUND TO SEE WHO WAS COMING.
WHO IS THIS STRANGER?
WELCOME, SIRS! PLEASE BE SEATED AND SHARE OUR FOOD. BE MY GUESTS TODAY.

THE PEASANT WELCOMED THE VISITORS.
WELCOME, SIRS! PLEASE BE SEATED AND SHARE OUR FOOD. BE MY GUESTS TODAY.
THE PARROT ALSO SAID THAT. THESE PEOPLE MUST BE EXTENDING HOSPITALITY TO ALL TRAVELLERS.


THEY ACCEPTED THE OFFER.
MAY I HAVE SOME MORE HONEY PLEASE?
HONEY? OH, YOU MEAN THE JAGGERY. CERTAINLY, SIR. WIFE, SERVE IT TO HIM.


THE FOOD IS DELICIOUS.
I WONDER HOW THEY MAKE HONEY WITHOUT BEES.


MEGASTHENES AND THE SERVANT BADE THE PEASANT AND HIS FAMILY GOODBYE AND RESUMED THEIR JOURNEY TO PATALIPUTRA.
THE MIGHTY GANGES AND HER IRRIGATION CANALS NO DOUBT BRING PROSPERITY TO THIS LAND.
THIS MAN CERTAINLY IS SHARP.


CONTINUING THEIR JOURNEY THEY CAME ACROSS A BANYAN TREE.

OH, WHAT A STRANGE TREE!

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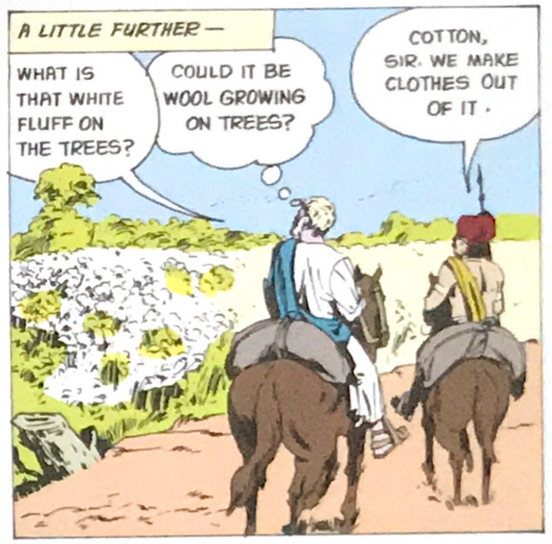
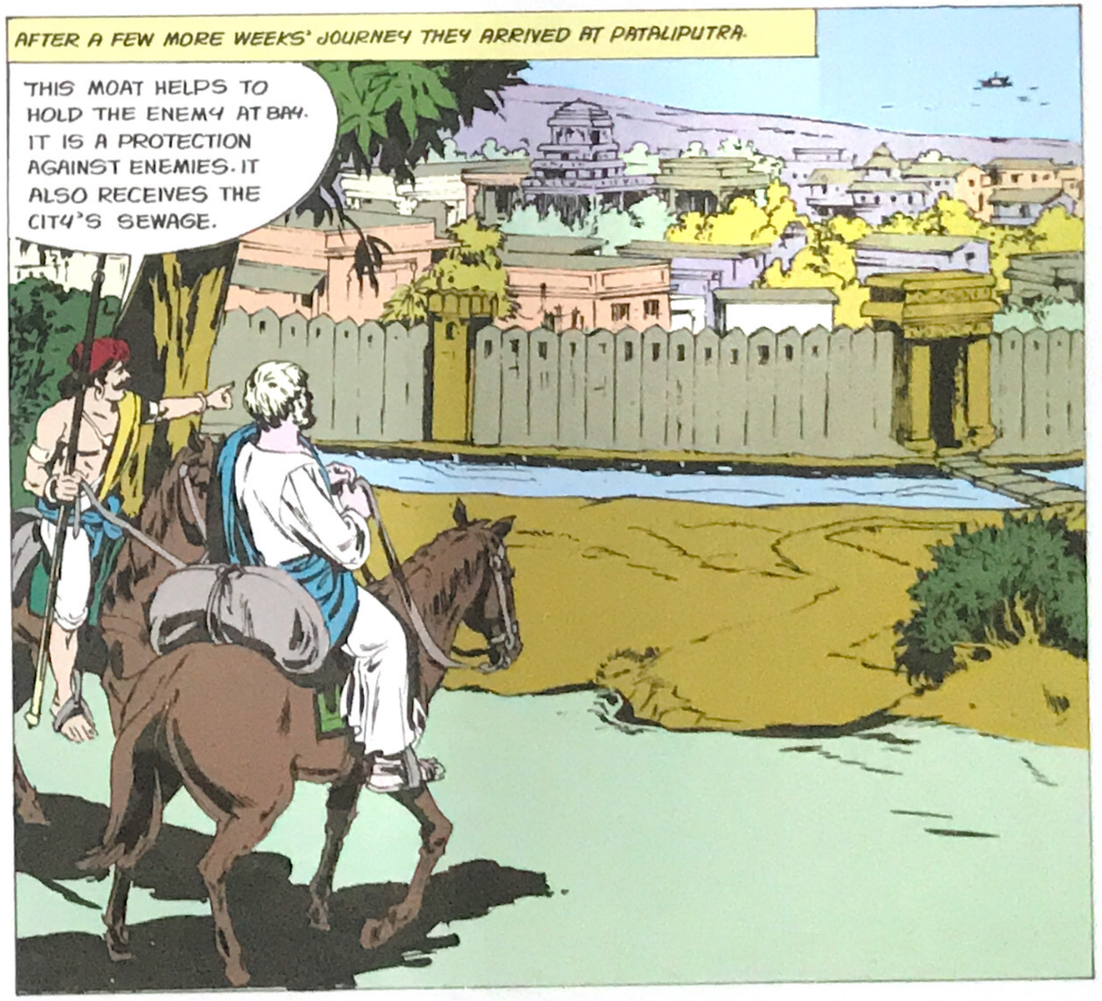
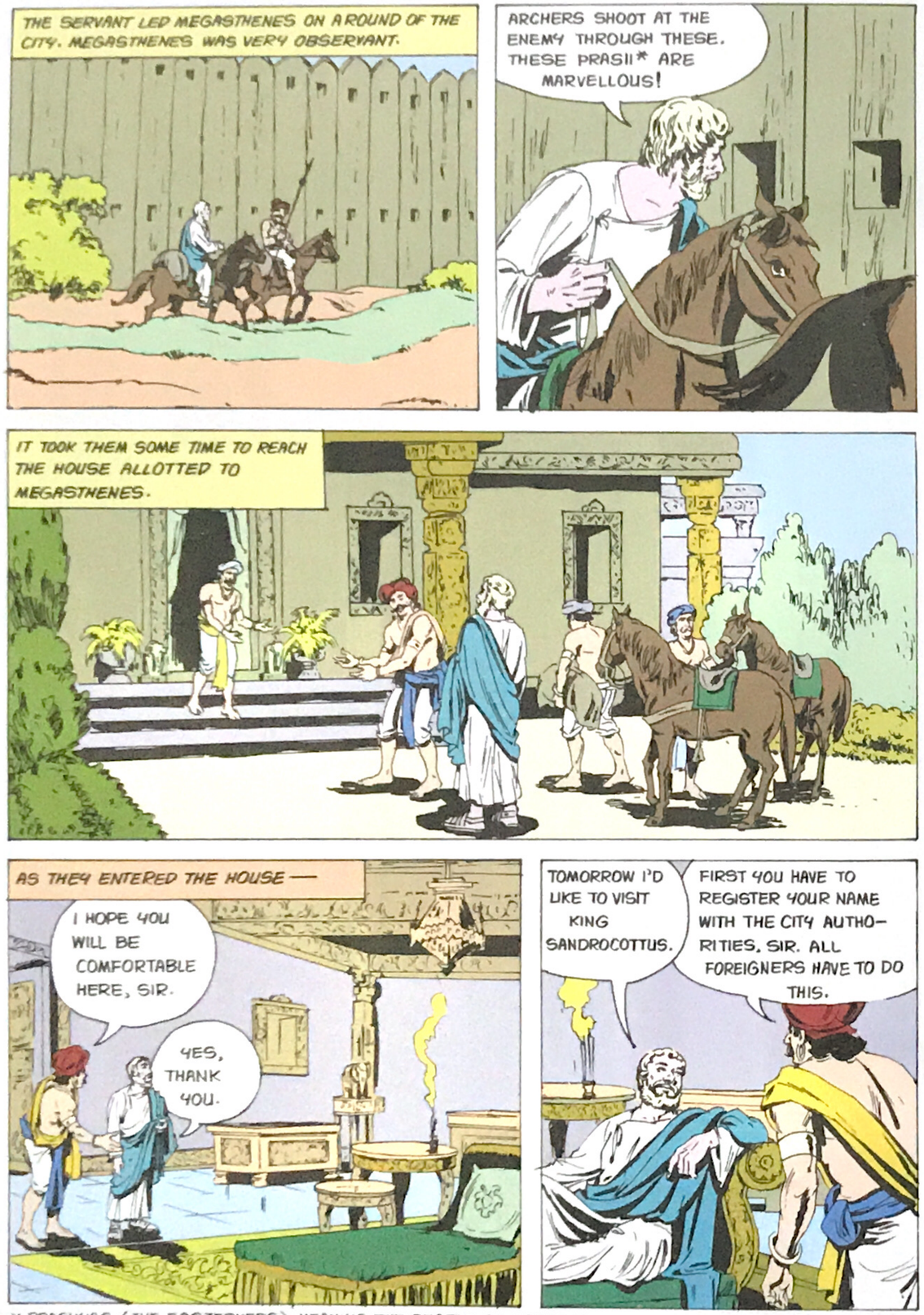
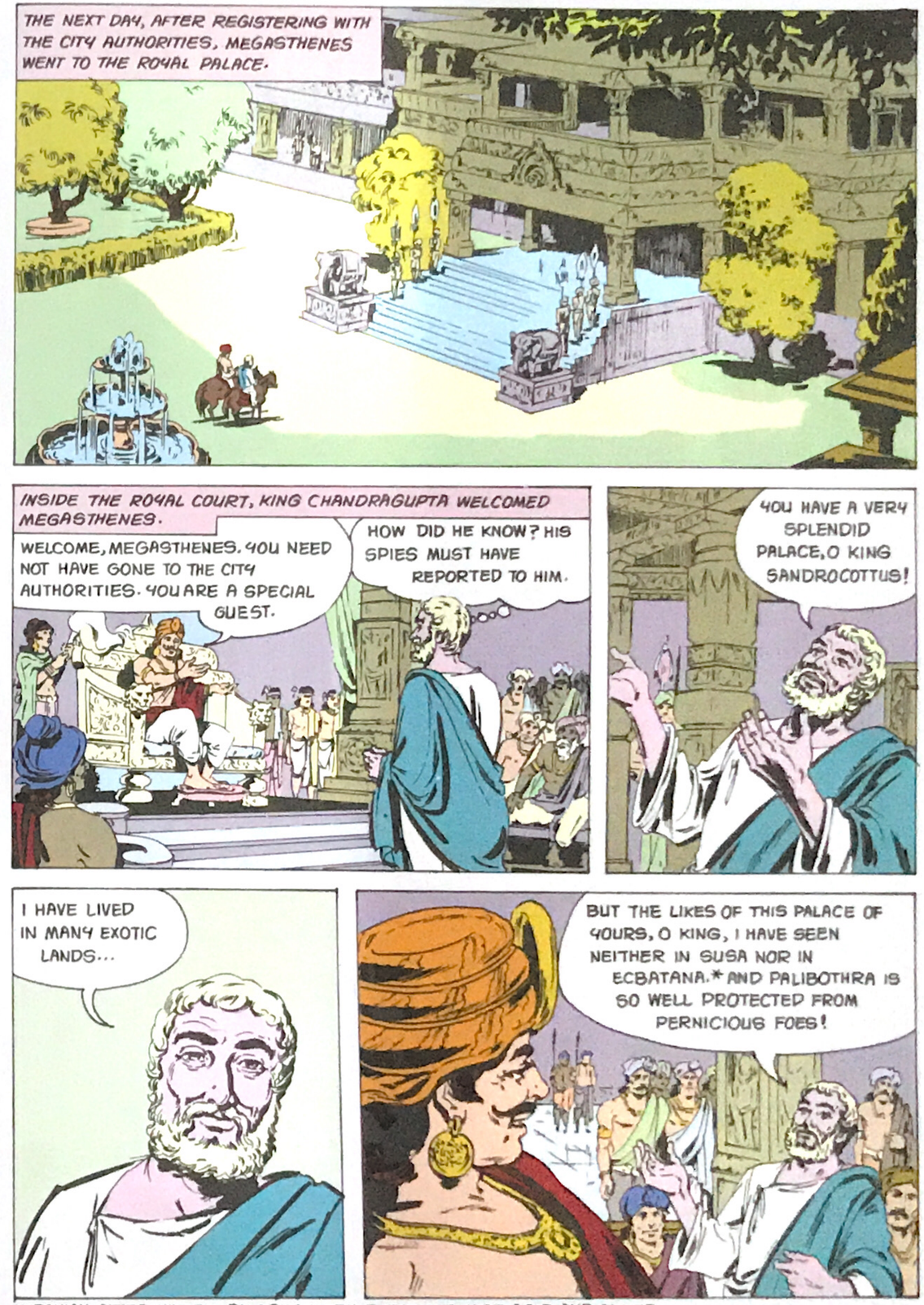


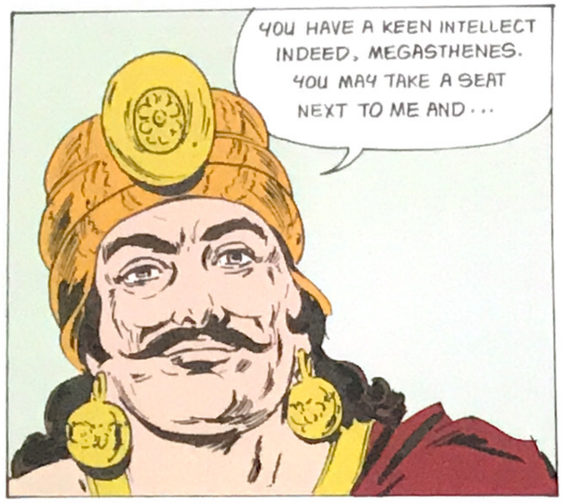


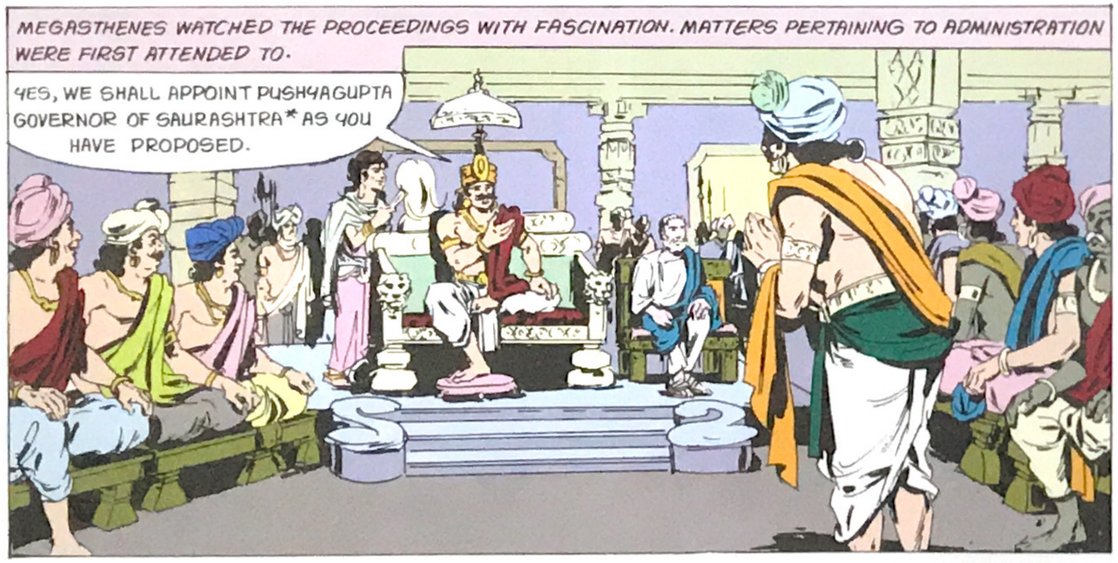


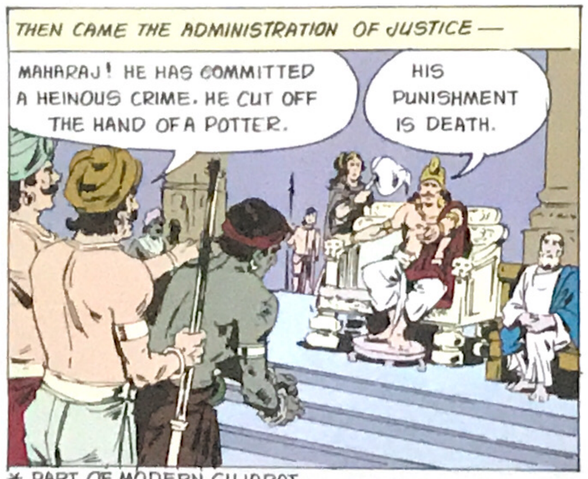
* PRACHYAS (THE EASTERNERS), MEANING THE PEOPLE OF MAGADHA

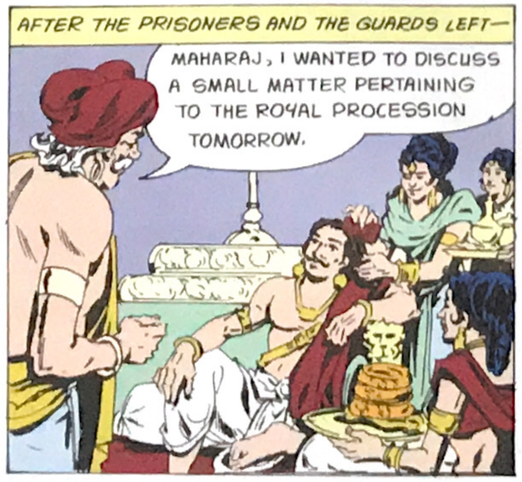


* IRANIAN CITIES WHERE PALACES WERE REPORTEDLY OF GOLD AND SILVER.

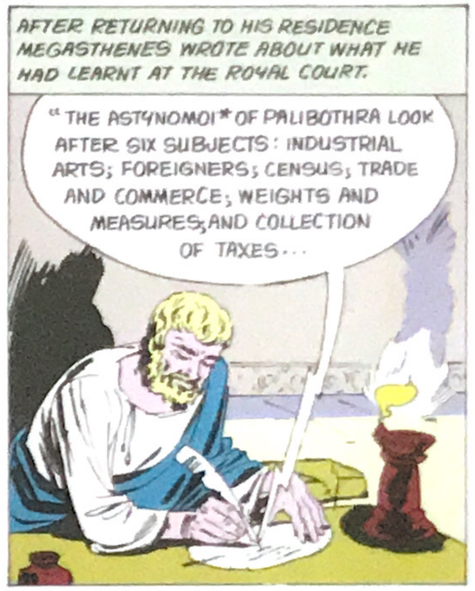




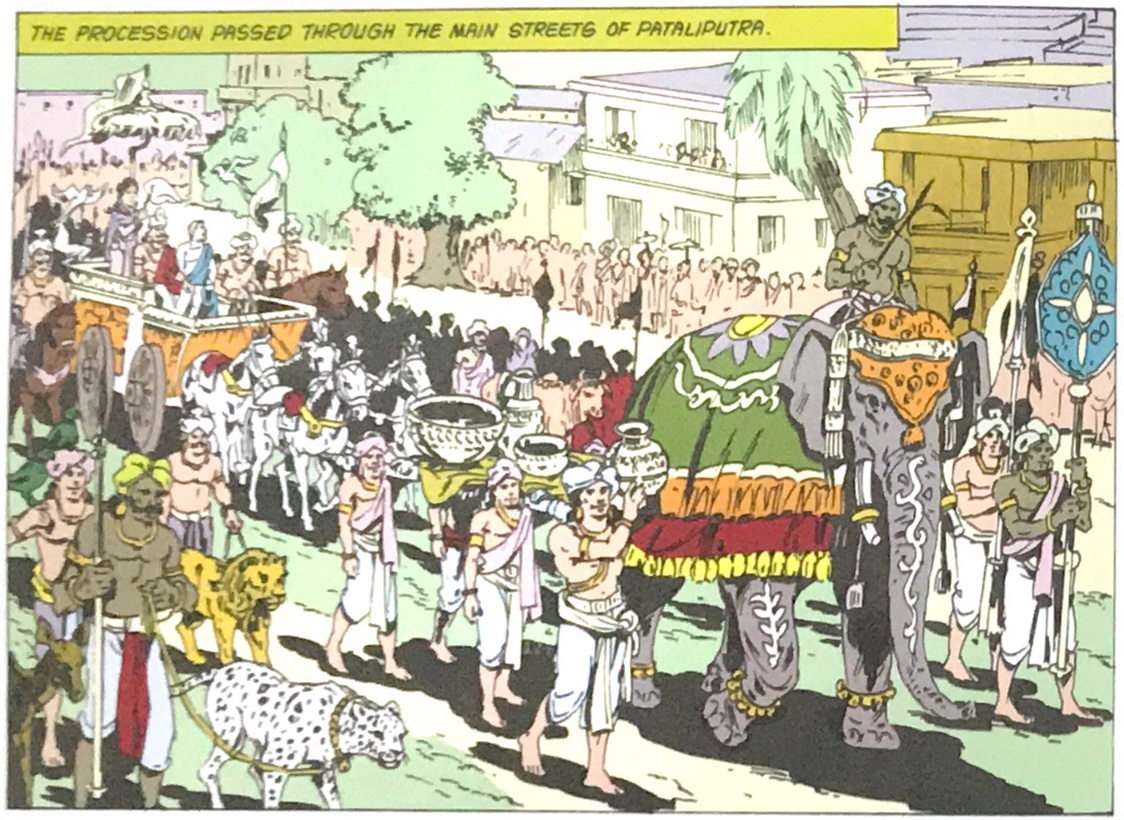




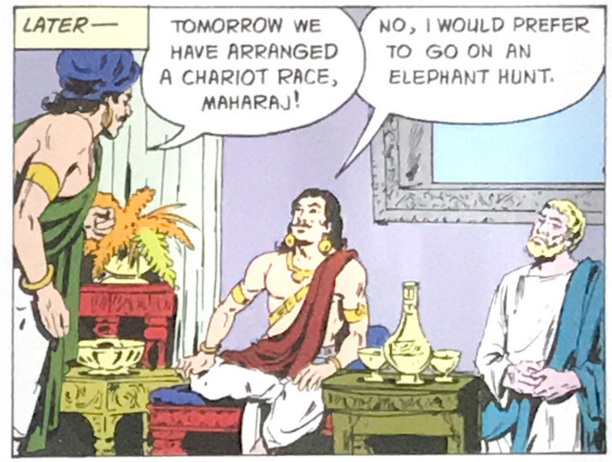
* PART OF MODERN GUJARAT.



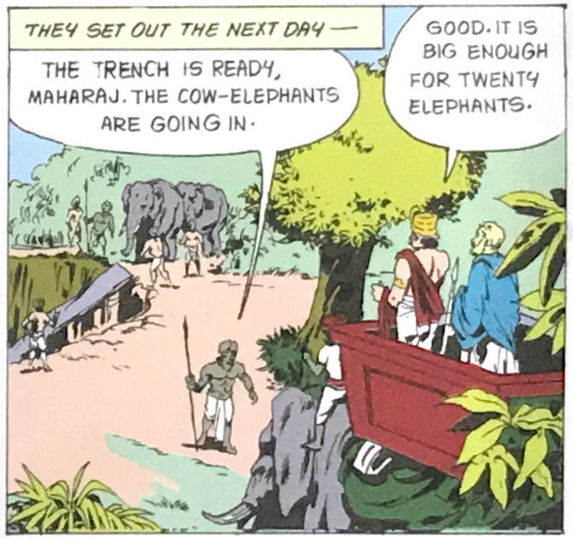
*Officers, perhaps from ashta = eight ministers. †It is presumed that the occasion was Vasanta Panchami. Megasthenes has not mentiones the name of the festival.

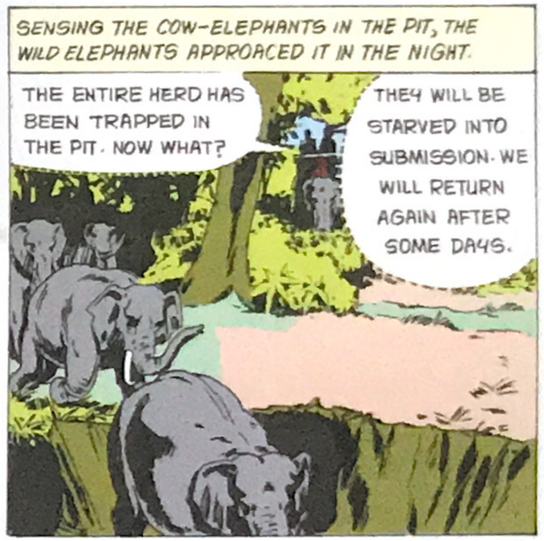

THE PROCESSION PASSED THROUGH THE MAIN STREETS OF PATALIPUTRA.

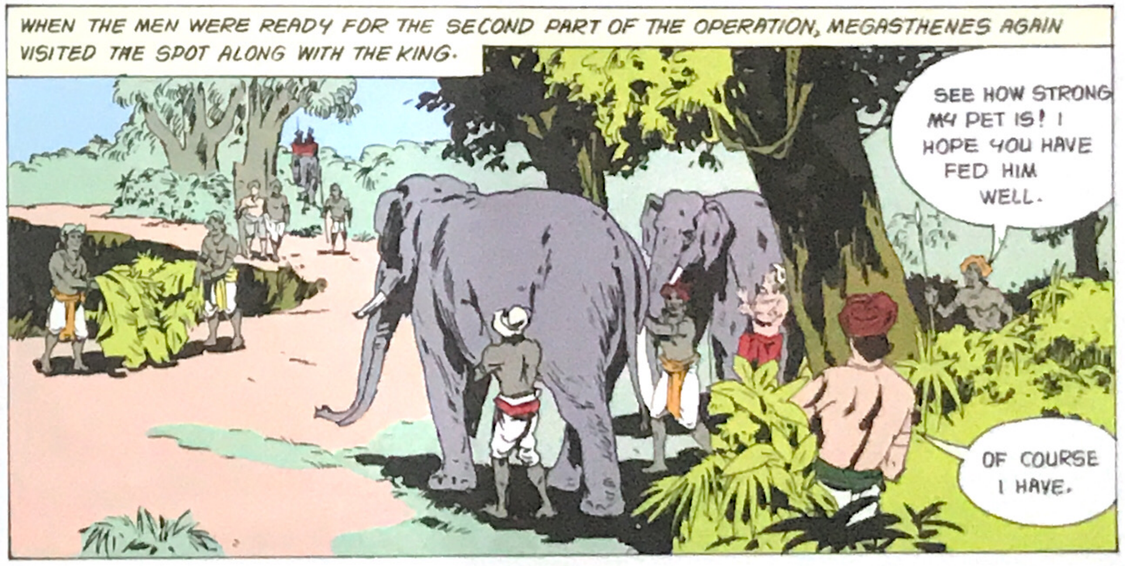
AFTER RETURNING TO THE PALACE, THE KING RECEIVED VISITORS —
MAHARAJ, PLEASE ACCEPT THIS HUMBLE GIFT FROM ME.
OBVIOUSLY, THIS IS AN OCCASION WHEN GIFTS ARE PRESENTED TO THE KING.

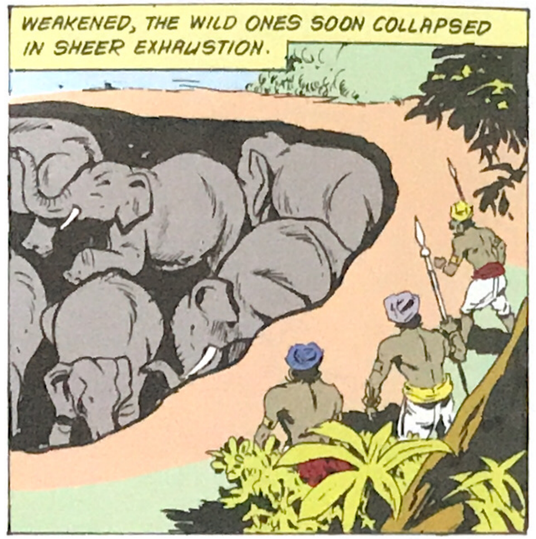

LATER —
TOMORROW WE HAVE ARRANGED A CHARIOT RACE, MAHARAJ!
NO, I WOULD PREFER TO GO ON AN ELEPHANT HUNT.

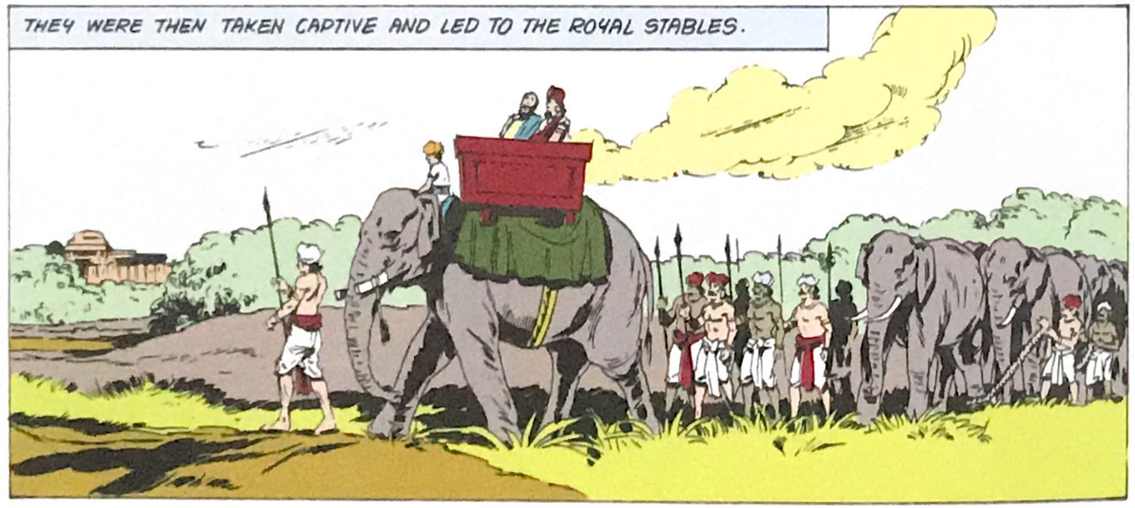
WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME, MEGASTHENES?
I'LL BE HONOURED, O KING.

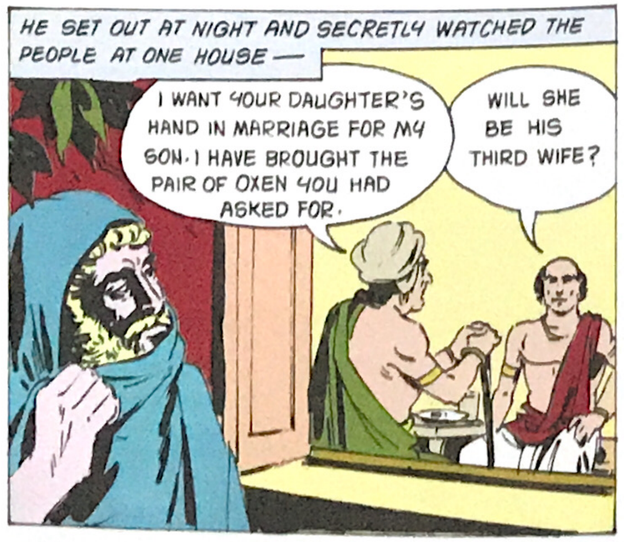

THEY SET OUT THE NEXT DAY —
THE TRENCH IS READY, MAHARAJ. THE COW-ELEPHANTS ARE GOING IN.
GOOD. IT IS BIG ENOUGH FOR TWENTY ELEPHANTS.

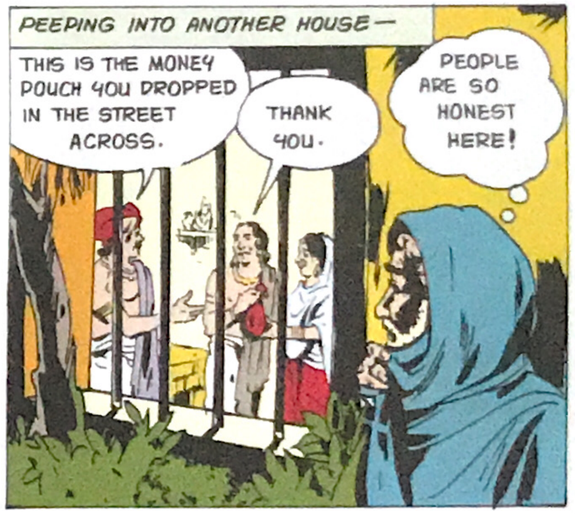

SENSING THE COW-ELEPHANTS IN THE PIT, THE WILD ELEPHANTS APPROACED IT IN THE NIGHT.
THE ENTIRE HERD HAS BEEN TRAPPED IN THE PIT. NOW WHAT?
THEY WILL BE STARVED INTO SUBMISSION. WE WILL RETURN AGAIN AFTER SOME DAYS.

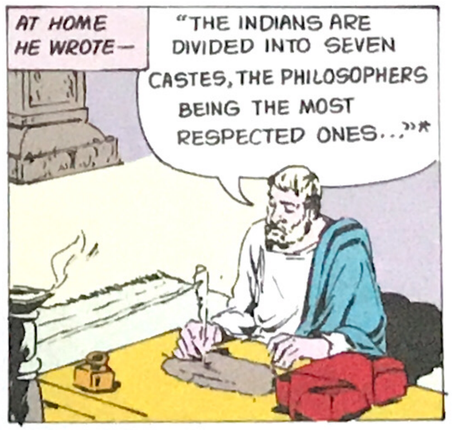

WHEN THE MEN WERE READY FOR THE SECOND PART OF THE OPERATION, MEGASTHENES AGAIN VISITED THE SPOT ALONG WITH THE KING.
SEE HOW STRONG MY PET IS! I HOPE YOU HAVE FED HIM WELL.
OF COURSE I HAVE.



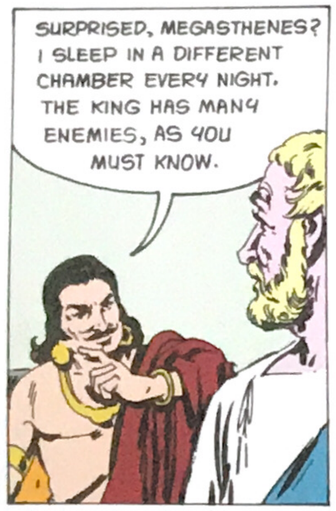


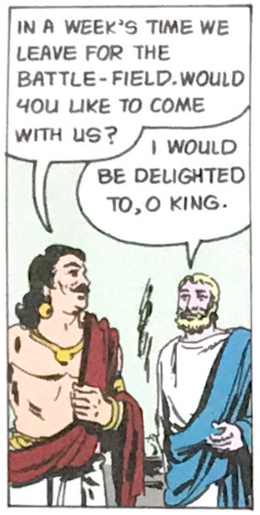


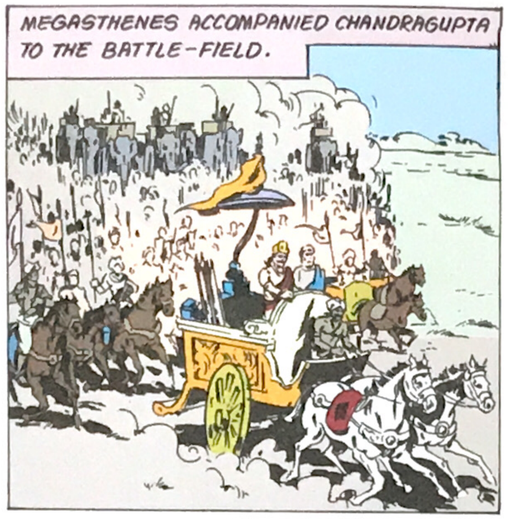




* THE COMPLICATED CASTE STRUCTURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY OBVIOUSLY BEWILDERED MEGASTHENES, FOR THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ONLY FOUR PRIMARY CASTES.

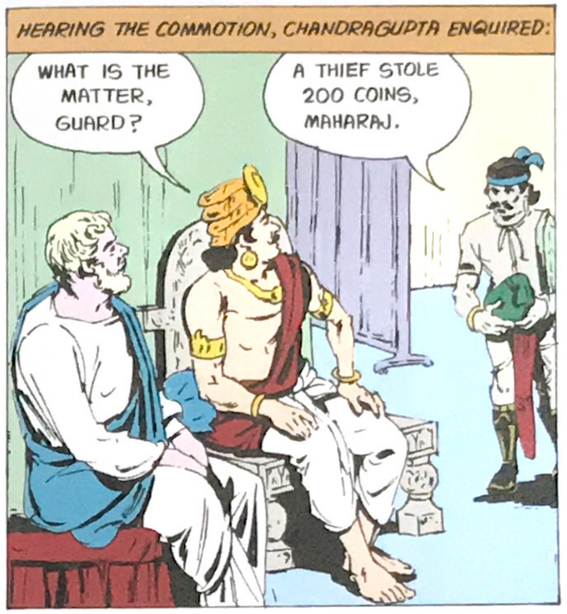

SURPRISED, MEGASTHENES? I SLEEP IN A DIFFERENT CHAMBER EVERY NIGHT. THE KING HAS MANY ENEMIES, AS YOU MUST KNOW.

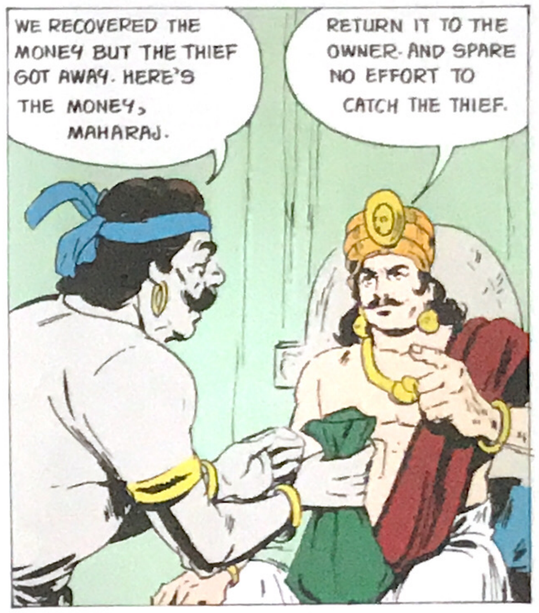

IN A WEEK'S TIME WE LEAVE FOR THE BATTLE-FIELD. WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME WITH US?
I WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO, O KING.


MEGASTHENES ACCOMPANIED CHANDRAGUPTA TO THE BATTLE-FIELD.

THEY PITCHED TENTS AT NIGHT.

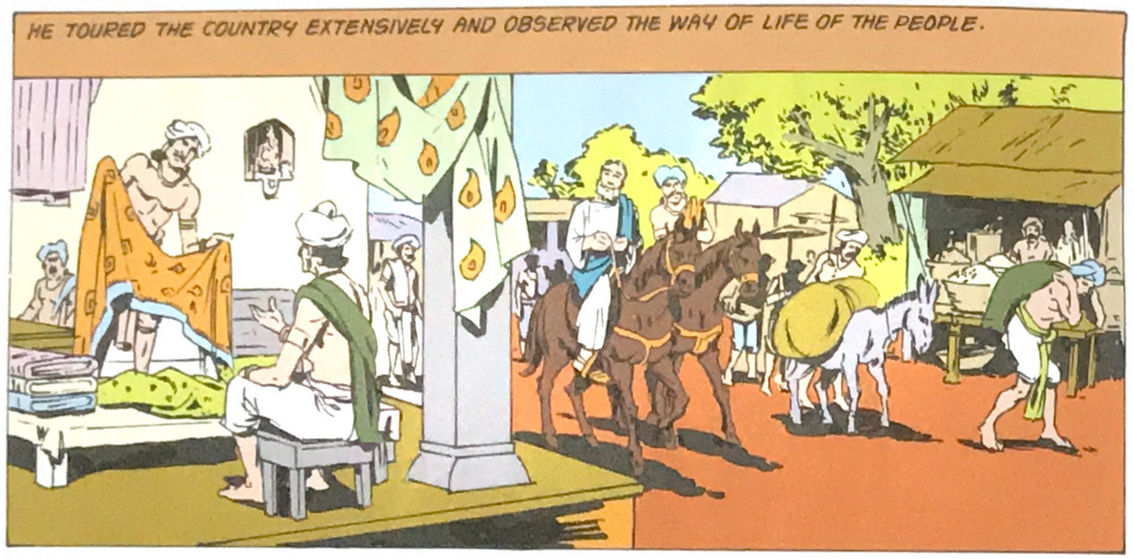
SUDDENLY THERE WAS A COMMOTION IN THE CAMP.
LET GO OF ME!
STOP, THIEF!
DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE!

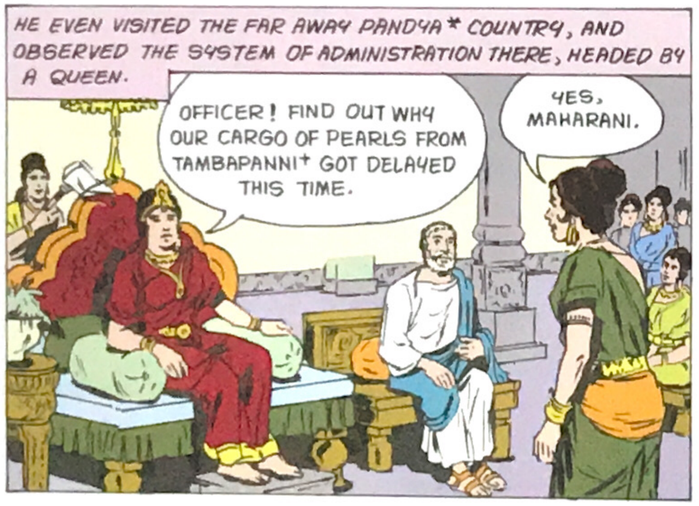

HEARING THE COMMOTION, CHANDRAGUPTA ENQUIRED:
WHAT IS THE MATTER, GUARD?
A THIEF STOLE 200 COINS, MAHARAJ.

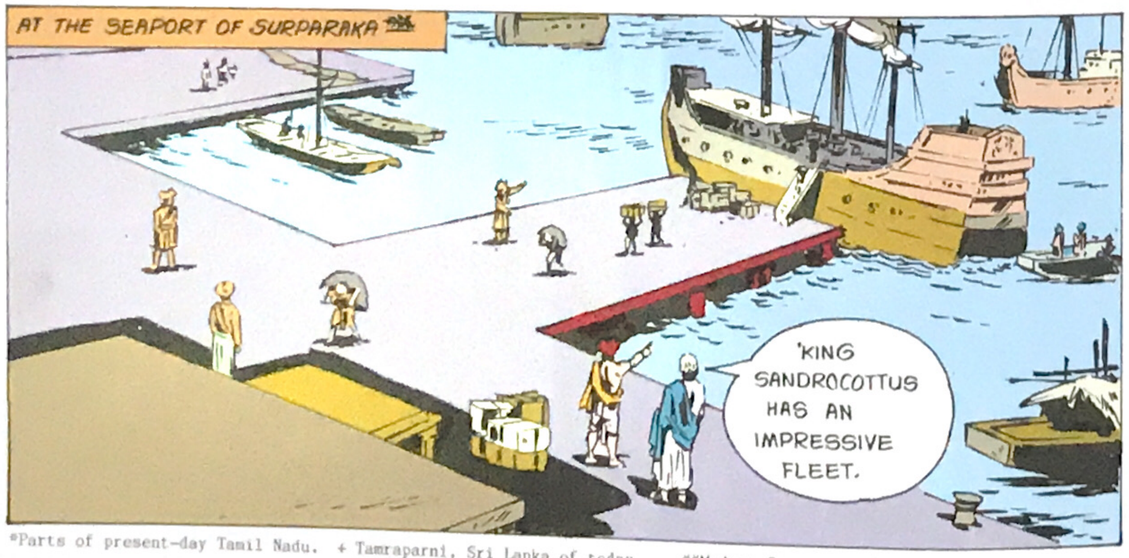
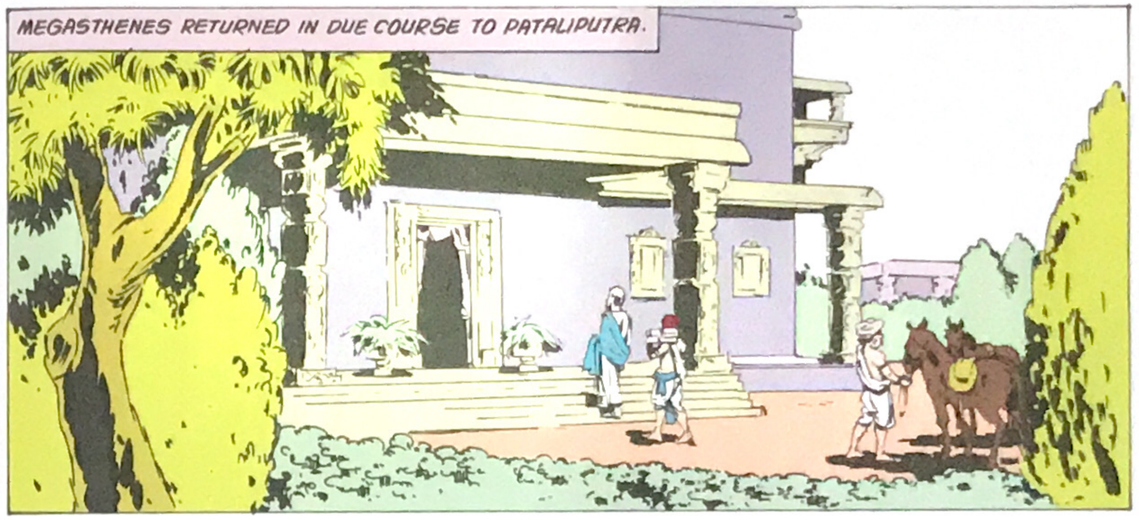
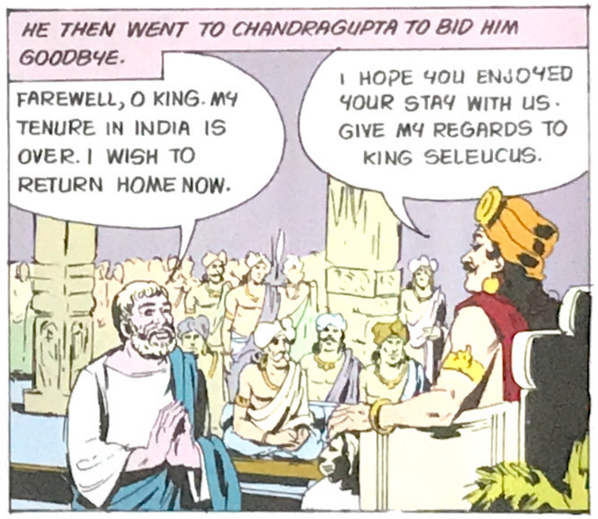
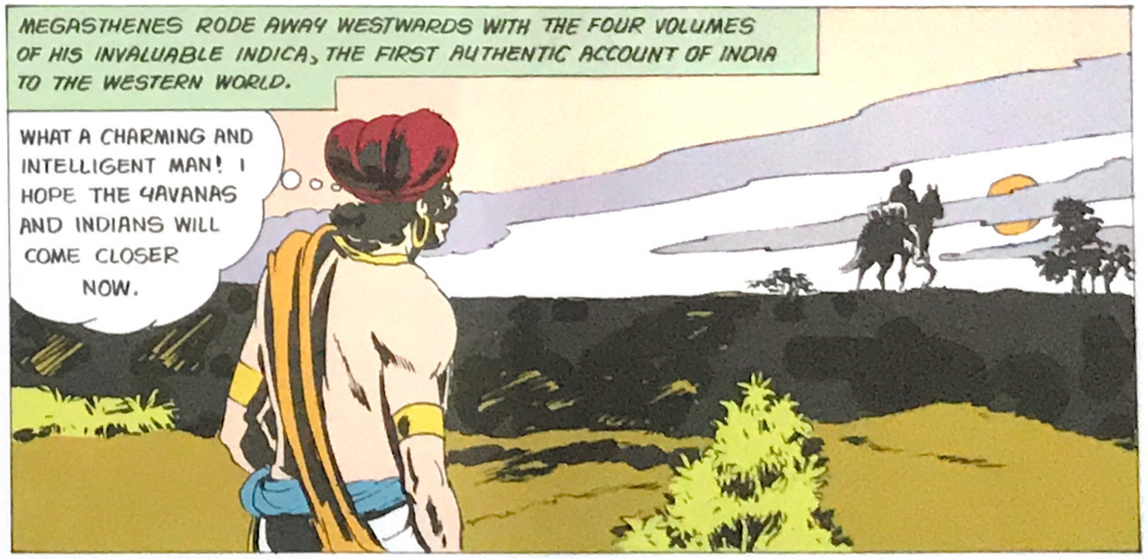

WE RECOVERED THE MONEY BUT THE THIEF GOT AWAY. HERE'S THE MONEY, MAHARAJ.
RETURN IT TO THE OWNER. AND SPARE NO EFFORT TO CATCH THE THIEF.

MEGASTHENES WAS INTRIGUED BY THE INCIDENT.
200 COINS IS A SMALL AMOUNT, O KING. WHY ARE YOU MAKING SUCH A FUSS?
STEALING IS A RARE OCCURRENCE. BUT IF THIS GOES UNPUNISHED, THE VICE MAY SPREAD.

MEGASTHENES LATER WROTE HIS OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ARMY:
"THE 600,000 SOLDIERS OF SANDROCOTTUS' ARMY ARE VERY WELL-PAID. THEY ARE CONTROLLED BY A WAR OFFICE WITH SIX BOARDS..."







*Parts of present-day Tamil Nadu. + Tamraparni, Sri Lanka of today. **Modern Sopara on the Western Coast.